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JUST THINK,  
I Could Have Been Normal

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Growing Up *Extraordinary* with Cerebral Palsy

Nova Bannatyne-Eng

Edited by  
George Vernon William Kruse



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Permission to quote his poem *A Prisoner of Dependence* was graciously provided by poet Richard A. Watson.

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## DEDICATION

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This book is dedicated  
to my family.



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## PREFACE

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Nova Bannatyne-Eng was born with cerebral palsy (CP), brain damage due to a lack of oxygen. She was never expected to walk or talk or live a full life amongst ‘normal’ children. However, she proved many people wrong.

Born in 1956 and raised in Kimberley, BC, Nova was one of the first students with a significant disability to be integrated into and graduate from public school in British Columbia. This autobiography, *Just Think, I Could Have Been Normal*, documents Nova’s life from her earliest memories until high school graduation. Her candid story chronicles many examples of how – with tenacity and the support of others – she faced and overcame adversity.

While working as a public school teacher and principal, I read aloud to students draft excerpts of Nova’s autobiography; they listened intently, often sharing with their parents the poignancy of her struggles. The authentic enthusiasm of my students inspired me to help Nova edit and publish her story, which she hopes will build in those who read it greater sensitivity toward people with CP.

~ *George Vernon William Kruse, Editor*



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Why did I write this book about growing up with cerebral palsy (or CP as most people refer to it)? My purpose in writing it was threefold: to increase awareness about CP; to build greater sensitivity toward people with CP; and to inspire people with CP to lead more fulfilling lives.

CP is not a disease. However, CP is a *permanent condition* that occurs when a child's developing brain is damaged; it can occur to a child in the womb, during birth and up until about the age of three. In my case, the umbilical cord was compressed during a breech (feet first) birth, depriving my brain of oxygen and leading to brain damage.

CP can affect fine and gross motor control, ranging from light tremors to severe spasticity, from almost no sign of it to one being confined to a wheelchair. Still, it is important to note that *many people with CP have a normal range of intelligence*. In my case, it especially affects my ability to speak, use my hands and walk.

Few people understand CP. When able-bodied people encounter someone like me, misunderstanding is normal and avoidance is common; my slurred speech, spastic walking and shaky

hands are unsettling for them. Often, people treat me as though I am mentally disabled or they simply ignore me. However, when people take a risk and open up to me, I am able to show that I am intelligent and, even more importantly, that I have a sense of humour. And by accepting and befriending me, they empower me.

Richard A. Watson wrote this poem about living with CP and the power of friendship:

### A PRISONER OF DEPENDENCE

A prisoner of dependence am I  
Whom fate convicted  
In the delivery room;  
Serving a life sentence  
With no hope of parole.

Behind the bars of my handicap  
I must make my life and career.  
Through a crack in the wall  
I peer upon the normal world  
Which I can never touch.

Though I am serving time  
For the crime of being born,  
I am not shackled to the wall;  
For I have friends who break the chains.  
They set me free.

People with CP can – and should – lead full lives in spite of their condition. But they are too often told what they *can't* do, not what they *can* do. Caregivers can be over-protective and unwilling to allow their loved ones to take risks and try new things. My story demonstrates time and time again that the seemingly impossible *is possible* in spite of CP. My hope is to inspire people with CP and other disabilities to seek the support of others and, through determination, set themselves free.

~ Nova Bannatyne-Eng, Spring 2016



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## CHAPTER 1

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**T**he first thing I remember about my childhood in Kimberley, British Columbia, is playing in the good old dirty mud puddles. And I remember playing sticks and stones, too – just like normal kids.

But right away I could tell I was different. For instance, I had to wear ugly, high army-like boots. I pleaded with my mother to buy me fancy new running shoes because my playmates would boast about theirs and then laugh at my ‘funny boys’ boots.’

Mom’s reply was always the same: “Nova, Dr. Quille said those are the only kind of shoes you can wear, and that’s *that!*”

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My family was closely knit. I can remember feeling like a queen sitting in my highchair across the kitchen table from my three older sisters, Nita, Jeannie and Florence. Mom would feed me, but if she was too busy or tired, my second oldest sister, Jeannie, would take over, even if she hadn’t eaten.

Jeannie was always there when I needed her. She’d help me if I fell or if I wanted something I couldn’t pick up. She even

took me along when she went shopping or to the movies. And she'd always let me crawl into bed with her if I had a nightmare.



Early in the summer of 1960, when I was four years old, Nita, who was six, walked me to a nearby wading pool. I was scared of the water, so I just sat at the edge of the pool watching Nita and letting my feet get wet.

As we left the pool about a half hour later, we met up with some kids from another neighbourhood. They laughed as soon as they saw me and started to imitate the way I shuffled awkwardly along. I couldn't understand why they were imitating me, but I remember how awfully hurt I felt and how I cried.

Nita yelled, "Get out of here you stupid, dirty, skinny kids!" And then she ran after them and chased them away.

I was still crying when we got home, so Nita explained things to my parents and our two older sisters: "Some kids from across town laughed at her and they copied her way of walking."

"Why ... the'-cop-y ... me ... Da'-dy?" I asked. "Why ... it hur' ... s'-much?"

Dad just stared solemnly at Mom and then turned away.

Jeannie, who was standing beside Florence, came over and took my hand. She tried to explain why I was different. "You're special, Nova. You have something called cerebral palsy ... CP. Your brain was hurt when you were born. That's why you have to wear special boots and sometimes go to Children's Hospital."

But I was too young to fully understand and still felt hurt and angry.



Soon after this incident, Mom took me to Vancouver for what would become the first of many summer stays at Children's Hospital. I remember getting on a small propeller-driven plane with her and waving good-bye to my dad and three sisters.

We sat at the very front of the plane, but the stewardess asked Mom to move to the back because she was a heavy woman and there was too much weight in the front for take off.

Being left alone frightened me. "Ma-ma! ... Ma-ma! ... Ma-ma!" I screamed.

The stewardess, who was buckled in close by, tried to comfort me, but it was no use because all I wanted was my mother.

When we were air bound, Mom returned and held me tightly until we landed in Vancouver. My Uncle Bobby and Auntie Laura, my dad's brother and sister, met us at the airport.

I had fallen in love with my uncle during one of his many visits to Kimberley. He was the kindest person you could ever meet and full of fun. I hobbled excitedly to him, and he hoisted me up for a big kiss and hugged me like he meant it.

My aunt, who had a cigarette in her hand and smelled of liquor, kissed and hugged me too, but it felt cold.

After locating our luggage, my uncle drove us to his apartment.

I didn't know it then, but my Uncle Bobby was probably the one who was responsible for me learning how to walk. The doctors at home and in Vancouver had told my parents that I'd never walk. However, my uncle had proven them wrong.

Uncle Bobby would get me to hold on to a broomstick and then lead me around our kitchen with it. When I became steady enough on my feet, he'd pull the broomstick a short distance away and have me walk to it, challenging me each time to walk

a wee bit further. In this way, little by little, I became better and better at walking by myself. If not for Uncle Bobby, I am sure I'd have ended up in a wheelchair.

During dinner at my uncle's apartment, Mom gave news from home in exchange for family gossip from the Vancouver area.

After dinner, my uncle tickled and teased me and then brought out a colouring book and crayons. I didn't realize it at the time, but I made an awful mess of the picture because of my CP; I couldn't coordinate my hand well enough to colour a pretty picture.

Still, I played with my uncle right up until bedtime while my aunt gossiped with Mom. Before bed we said good-bye to Auntie Laura; she had to catch a bus home to her apartment in New Westminster.

That night I slept close to Mom in the same bed.



When I woke up the next morning, Mom was busy making breakfast for my uncle and me.

I made my way over to my uncle's knee and he helped me to climb up. Then he helped me with my soft-boiled eggs and toast and juice. I don't know how Uncle Bobby managed it, but I remember that we both laughed all the way through breakfast.

After breakfast, Mom gave me a bath, and after dressing me, said, "When we get to the hospital, you be good. Do what the doctor tells you."

"Ca'-I-com' ... hom'-then, Ma-ma?" I asked, but she just gave me a hug and told me to go find Uncle Bobby.

We left for the hospital with my uncle making jokes about

Mom's Dutch accent and her getting right back at him about his weight and bald head.

When we arrived at Children's Hospital, Uncle Bobby didn't get out of the car when we did – and this confused me. "I'd rather wait here," he mumbled, looking straight ahead.

Mom gave him a disappointed but understanding look, then turned me around before I could say a word, took me by the hand, and led the way to the hospital.

When we entered the huge lobby of Children's Hospital, I saw a few kids in wheelchairs and others on crutches. Mom pointed at something, and my eyes focused on a little rocking chair in one corner of the lobby. We made our way over to it, and in a commanding tone of voice she said, "You sit here and stay put while I tell them we're here."

Right away I noticed a gigantic teddy bear surrounded by children in another corner of the lobby. I wanted to go over and pat it, but I was afraid that if I was gone when Mom came back, she'd leave. So I sat and rocked.

When Mom returned, I pointed at the teddy bear.

"No, Nova," she said. "We have to wait right where we are until it's time to see Dr. Quille."

Instead of putting up a fuss, I rocked some more while she stood beside me reading a magazine.

Finally a receptionist appeared and said, "Mrs. Bannatyne, bring Nova this way, please."

Mom took me by the hand, and a nurse led us to a large room with four examining tables and then pointed to one in a corner. She drew some white drapes and it seemed as though we were in one small room. Mom began to undress me, even taking off my ugly boots. Then she helped me put on a little white gown.

Very soon Dr. Quille came in and greeted us with a smile. He shook my mother's hand and asked her if we'd had a good flight. Then he pulled a large red lollipop from the pocket of his white coat and said, "As soon as we're finished the examination, this is for you, Nova."

I felt afraid. I sensed the treat was his way of winning my trust, so I kept my eyes on Mom. As long as she was in sight, I knew everything would be alright.

First he took his stethoscope and listened to my heart. Then he stuck a wooden stick down my throat to check it. He also examined my eyes and did all the things my doctor at home did.

Next he asked me to lie flat on my back, and he put his left hand directly above me and told me to touch it with my right hand. I did that without too much difficulty. But when I tried to do the same thing with my left hand, it jerked as I raised it from my side. It took several tries, but I finally connected my left hand with his.

He then wrapped his cold hands around my right foot and pulled upwards. He did the same with my left foot. After that, he helped me up and off the table and had me try to walk along a white line painted on the floor. I did as I was told.

When Dr. Quille was finished, I immediately turned to Mom and grabbed her tightly around the neck, and she put her arms around me. He wrote on a note pad for a while before telling Mom that a nurse would take us upstairs. And then ... he left, forgetting about the lollipop. Mom and I stared at each other. She knew what I was thinking, so she reached into her purse, smiled oddly and handed me a box of Smarties.

Somehow I knew this was also an offering: it was a signal for her to return home and leave me in Vancouver.

“Don’-lea’-me ... Ma-ma,” I begged.

But she replied, “I have to go home, Nova, to look after Nita, Jeannie and Florence, to cook and clean for your dad.”

Tears filled my eyes.

“Don’t start that, Nova; before you know it, you’ll be home.”

But I wasn’t the only one with tears. Mom was crying, too. She didn’t like leaving me any more than I liked staying.

The nurse came in saying, “Nova, this way please,” and as she tried to take my hand, I clung to my mother. There was no way I was letting go.

We entered an elevator and went up a few floors. As we exited we came upon a small boy wriggling and convulsing on the floor. It looked as though he had fallen down, so Mom reached down to help him. But the nurse said, “No, Mrs. Bannatyne. He has to learn to get up on his own without help.”

“But he seems so helpless lying there. How can you watch such a thing, not pick him up, not show him some affection?” Mom had both sympathy and anger in her voice.

The nurse replied, “Believe me, it’s hard, but that’s what they’re here for – to learn.”

We walked slowly away from the struggling boy. I looked back as Mom dragged me along, and I noticed he was making a good effort to get up. But he disappeared from view as we turned a corner.

We finally arrived at a big desk where there were papers for Mom to sign. Then we headed to the ward where I was to live for the next two months. The nurse took us on to a big gate that separated the ward from the rest of the hospital. This is where I had to say good-bye to my mother.

She looked at me lovingly and knelt down.

“Mum-my, don’-lea’-me ... plea’-don’-go!” I cried, and I wrapped my arms around her neck so tightly that the nurse had to pry me away.

In the nurse’s arms I kicked, punched, and screamed at the top of my lungs. But Mom, with tears in her eyes, turned and walked away at a fast pace.

The nurse let me down on the other side of the gate, and I immediately grabbed onto it and shrieked at Mom, pleading with her to come back. But she didn’t look back; she kept on walking until she was out of sight. The nurse lifted me up and away from the gate and carried me kicking, screaming and crying down a hallway. She tried to comfort me, saying Mom would come back, but this made me kick and scream and cry even harder.

She took me to a huge room where there were about twenty-five beds, some with kids sitting on them. Other kids were playing here and there throughout the room. They all looked up as the nurse carried me to my bed. By this time I had settled down somewhat, but I was still whimpering and calling for my mom.

The nurse washed my face, took off the hospital gown, and helped me put on a little nightie that had been laid upon my bed. And then a second nurse appeared carrying my ugly black boots. When she approached to put them on, I began fighting harder than ever. Once again, I desperately wanted to escape.

I guess the nurses had enough because next they put me in a straight jacket and gave me a needle.

Soon I was fast asleep.



In the next few days, I was a constant nuisance to the nurses. I would not stop screaming for my mom and other members of

my family. As a result, I was moved to a smaller room where I wouldn't disturb anyone. But still I'd run to the window and wail hysterically. So they moved me from a bed into a crib and tied me down at night in a straight jacket.



After a week and a half, I was somehow able to put aside the nagging need to escape. I began to cope better with the loneliness of being away from my family. I met and played with other children, and I went to therapy.

Each therapy session helped to develop my coordination and strength. Therapists had me walk in a straight line and match blocks that had identical shapes on them. Matching the blocks was difficult because my left hand was too shaky as I tried to connect shape to shape. However, lacing a big, blue boot that looked like it belonged to the Friendly Giant was pretty easy. And swimming, where a therapist took me in her arms and walked me in the water, was even easier.

One day, after many weeks without a visit from anyone in my family, Uncle Bobby visited unexpectedly. I was sitting on a chair in a corner of the hall and playing with a doll Mom had left when I heard the big gate open. As soon as I saw who it was, I threw down the doll and hobbled as speedily as I could to my uncle. He knelt down and picked me up, and I grabbed him around the neck and hugged him tightly so he couldn't get away.

The head nurse let my uncle take me outside where there was a swing, playhouse and sandbox. We spent the whole afternoon outside playing, and I remember laughing uncontrollably over one of his tricks. He'd ask me to twist his left ear and when I did his false teeth would pop out. I twisted and twisted that ear until

it was so red and sore that he simply had to take me back into the hospital. It was the only way I'd leave him alone!

Uncle Bobby fed me dinner that evening. Unlike the head nurse who usually fed me so hurriedly that I hardly tasted the food, he took his time and pretended the spoon of food was a train going into a tunnel. Sometimes, though, he got me giggling so much I could barely eat.

Soon after dinner, visiting hours were over. It was time for my uncle to go. He promised that if I didn't cry, he'd come back soon. Then he gave me a tight hug and a big kiss, and he walked away without a look back – just like Mom did when she left me. However, I refused to cry because I was afraid that if I did he'd keep his word and not come back. I just watched him walk out through the big gate.

The rest of my days at Children's Hospital passed routinely that summer. After breakfast each morning a nurse would bathe me; then I'd play with some of the other children. I became good friends with a boy named Mike. Sometimes he'd feed me lunch, and before long the only time we were apart was when I had therapy. And of course another good friend was Uncle Bobby. He kept his promise and came to see me often.



One day close to the end of summer, as I was playing with the giant teddy bear in the hospital lobby, I noticed that the hallway beyond was packed with people. I made my way closer to the crowd to investigate. As I gazed from person to person, I spied a familiar face. It was Jeannie!

As soon as I saw her, I took off, bumping my way through the crowd. It seemed that I ran a mile before my arms were

around her, hugging her tight. And then I noticed that right behind Jeannie was Mom. “Mum-my!” I shrieked. She flashed a big grin and pulled me away from Jeannie – and she held me for a long, long time.

A little later, as a nurse led us to my room, I wouldn’t move more than a foot away from Mom and Jeannie. It seemed like an eternity had past since I had watched Mom walk away from me at the start of the summer. Since she was back, I knew I’d be going home soon. I didn’t cry as Mom and Jeannie left after visiting hours that day. Knowing I was going home had lifted my spirits beyond tears.

Two days later, Dr. Quille gave me the last examination of the summer with Mom, Jeannie and Uncle Bobby watching. “I’ll be looking forward to seeing you next year, Nova,” he said as we all left. Believe me, the feeling wasn’t mutual.

We then made our way to my room where Mom emptied the contents of a brown paper bag onto the bed: a white summer dress, frilly white socks, and a cute pink purse with a shoulder strap. Jeannie got me all dolled up in my outfit while Mom went to sign me out.

A little later, Uncle Bobby was leading us through the big gate. I prayed I’d never see Children’s Hospital again, but deep down I knew I’d be back.



Mom, Jeannie and I spent two more days in Vancouver before we flew home. We stayed with Uncle Bobby, and on my first day of freedom he took us to the Pacific National Exhibition, better known as the P.N.E.

When we arrived at the P.N.E., everyone excitedly escorted

me to Playland, an amusement park. Jeannie took me on all the kiddies' rides, but unfortunately most of them scared me, especially the Ferris wheel, merry-go-round and Spook House.

On the Ferris wheel I cried and screamed for Mom because every time we came close to the ground I could see her but when I reached out for her we began to climb back up into the air. As we went up each time I shrieked and hung on to Jeannie for dear life. When we got off the Ferris wheel, Jeannie's arms were scratched raw; she looked like she had been attacked by some gigantic bug!

The merry-go-round wasn't quite so bad because I shut my eyes as it went around and up and down; and it helped too that Jeannie was right behind me. With her arms around me and her hands on mine, she helped me to grasp the pole and hang on.

The Spook House, however, was a different story. The halls were so narrow that I couldn't use my arms to help balance my spastic steps; as a result, I bounced uncontrollably from wall to wall and kept falling down. Jeannie ended up carrying me, but the eerie wailing coming out of the walls drove me berserk. I began to scream so terrifyingly she had to make a mad dash for the exit.

After the Spook House, I was so shaky and wobbly that I couldn't stand, even with help. Mom had to hold me in her arms for a long while and cuddle me.

Uncle Bobby felt sorry for me and bought me candy floss, but I made a mess of that, too. In no time it was stuck all over me, and my hands looked like they had little pink mothballs glued to them. By then Mom was exasperated, and trying not to touch me, she dragged me gently by the collar to the washroom to clean

my candy floss coated face and hands. Mom and Uncle Bobby decided that the time had come to leave the P.N.E.

As we made our way to the exit, Jeannie won a teddy bear by playing ring toss and had a chance to try the giant slide. I made a few noises about going on the slide with my sister, but because of the Spook House there was no way Mom would let me. On the way out I thought about all the children I had seen – their smiles, their laughter. I decided then and there that the P.N.E. was strictly for normal kids.



After breakfast the next morning at Uncle Bobby's, we were off in his car to the Vancouver airport to catch our plane home. My uncle told jokes and teased me right up until the moment he kissed me good-bye.

“I-lo’-you,” I said in his ear.

“I love you, too ... see you next summer,” he said in mine, his words reminding me that I’d be returning in another year to Children’s Hospital.

*At least I’ll see you again,* I thought.

As we left Uncle Bobby, he was crying and so were we.

When we boarded the plane for home, Mom didn’t have to move once she was settled because we were able to find three seats side by side at the back. Jeannie got the seat by the window, I was in the middle, and Mom was next to the aisle. After the Ferris wheel, I was nervous about being airborne again, so Mom and Jeannie each held one of my hands as we took off and kept assuring me there was nothing to be afraid of.

Once we had leveled out, Jeannie tried to keep me occupied by showing me how to use her yo-yo. I could make it go down

but couldn't make it come back up; and I couldn't wind the string between the wooden spools to try it again because my hands wouldn't cooperate. After many unsuccessful attempts, I gave up, laid my head on my sister's lap and fell asleep.

When I woke up, we had already landed. My dad, Nita and Florence were at the doors waiting for us as we entered the little lobby of the airport terminal building. Dad lifted me into his arms and hugged and kissed me, continuing to hold me tightly as he gave Mom and Jeannie a kiss. After more kisses from Nita and Florence, we collected our suitcases and Dad carried me to the car, with everyone else following.



*Florence, Nita, me and Jeannie.  
All my sisters looked out for me, especially Jeannie.*

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## CHAPTER 2

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In my neighbourhood there were about twenty of us who stuck together, and I was the smallest of them all.

Whenever Nita and I headed off to a friend's house, she'd take me by the hand and lead the way. But when we'd arrive, she'd leave me waiting outside while she went in. I didn't understand why at the time, but it was because of my clumsiness and because I drooled so heavily that my shirt was always wet. Our friends' parents were convinced I'd knock something over or make a mess if I came in. I didn't mind waiting. It was a small price for what I got in return. I felt important being with Nita and the older kids.

Our neighbourhood gang was good to me. None of them ever teased me or treated me as though I was different. And when we went out of our neighbourhood and I was mocked, they'd stick up for me – and even fight for me if they had to.

Across the street lived another 'special' girl named Beth, but the kids in the neighbourhood would have nothing to do with her. They called her a 'retard.' Beth's parents weren't like other kids' parents; they were open and kind and welcomed me into their home. Whenever I visited Beth, we'd play for hours.

Even though Beth was five years older (about the same age as Jeannie), she liked playing with cars and dolls, making mud pies and pretending long sticks were horses – just like I did.

At the supper table one evening, Mom started talking to Dad about her: “I thank God Nova isn’t like that. Remember the doctor who examined Nova a few days after she was born and said she’d be retarded? Then remember how Dr. Lang just laughed and said it wasn’t true. If Nova *had* been retarded, I’m sure we’d have had no choice but to send her to a home.”

Jeannie, who was feeding me, stared at Mom, horrified. Jeannie knew I had been listening.

“I-don’ ... wan-na-go ... ’way ... Mum-my!” I pleaded, and then I began crying hysterically. Mom realized what she had said, rushed over and picked me up. Her eyes were wide and apologetic. Dad came over, too, and he put his arms around us both.

Then Mom said, “We’ll never let you go, Nova. But you will have to go back to Vancouver next summer.”

I hated the thought of Children’s Hospital but was comforted enough to begin to contain my tears. Before long Jeannie was feeding me again and my thoughts wandered back to Beth. I didn’t understand what Mom had said about my friend. All I knew was that she was fun to play with. She’d help me cut my paper with her scissors, for example, whereas other friends and my family made me fend for myself, unless there was absolutely no way I could manage on my own. In my eyes, Beth was a good friend and that was all I cared about.



In September, the neighbourhood children were off to school – everybody, it seemed, except me. Mom tried to explain that I

couldn't go to school because I was only four, but I still thought it was unfair. Even Beth went to school. But Mom said that she went to a different type of school, much different from Nita, Jeannie and Florence's schools.

I didn't understand. All I knew was that every school day, once *Captain Kangaroo* was over on TV and Mom had begun to watch her soaps, I was bored. If it hadn't been for my dolls and stick horses, I'd have done nothing all morning.

After lunches and afternoon naps, Mom made me do therapy, and that never made me feel any better. It was as bad as spending afternoons back at Children's Hospital.

By four o'clock my sisters were home again. They'd take turns playing with me, and I'd ask about their day. I loved to hear about their teachers' antics and the games they played with classmates during recess and lunch breaks.

Not being in school, weekdays were long and lonely, but I didn't enjoy most weekends either. Dad was a heavy drinker, an alcoholic. On Saturdays and Sundays, even though everyone was home, we had to remain very quiet because usually he had been out drinking the night before and was in a bad mood.

Mom hated Dad's drinking. Almost every weekend they would have an argument for hours, until one of them stormed out. We'd sit quietly by watching *Sky King* or *Roy Rogers* or *Rin Tin Tin*. If Dad left, Mom would get us dressed and take us downtown. She'd treat us to a milkshake or take us shopping, I suppose to help us forget about Dad's drinking. Later, at home, if Dad hadn't returned, Mom would make us hot dogs or some other meal we liked. Then we'd settle down to some cartoons or maybe a movie.

Sometimes on a Sunday, whether Dad was hung over or not,

he'd make pancakes for the whole family. This was the only time he cooked. Mom would declare such a Sunday her day off, so Jeannie would be the one to feed me in my high chair. When Jeannie took a break or became distracted, I'd sometimes attempt to feed pancakes to myself, but this always ended in chaos. I'd get a couple of spoonfuls in my mouth, and then my hand would jerk spastically and pancake would just fly. Even worse, the cup of milk beside my dish would either end up in Jeannie's lap or on the floor.

Mom would get very angry and yell things like: "Why don't you just let Jeannie help you?"

I'd glance at her self-consciously, and she'd look away.

My sister meanwhile found these breakfast disasters humorous, even though she was usually the one who had to clean up.

Sundays often included getting dressed up and going for long drives. Sometimes we'd drive to the lake for a picnic, and I'd have a wonderful time playing on the beach with my sisters. My customary place was on Jeannie's shoulders. I was too slow and clumsy to race through the sand, so Jeannie's shoulders were definitely the best place to be. And anyways, at four years of age it seemed natural to be getting a ride on my big sister's shoulders.



I was also about four when I experienced my first Halloween. I remember that Flo, our name for Florence, dressed Nita up like a gypsy. Nita had cocoa all over her face, about eight necklaces around her neck, and the make-up was so thick around her eyes that she had trouble keeping them open. As for me, Mom wanted me to wear something roomy to walk in. She wanted me to be

able to get up to doors with as little trouble as possible so that people could easily drop goodies into my bag.

Jeannie put cocoa on my face just like Nita's. Then she fitted me with one of my Dad's old hats, and I looked just like a rubbidub off the street. They even found an old coat that looked like it had belonged to a hobo. It hung down as far as my shins, but not so far that my big ugly boots couldn't add to the costume.

Once we were dressed up, Jeannie, Nita and I headed out into the neighbourhood. From door to door we went. Jeannie held my hand and yelled out: "Trick or treat!" and Nita and I watched our bags fill up with candy.

After about a half hour, I got carried away with all the Halloween excitement and tried to break away from Jeannie. But as I tried to hobble off on my own, I fell and skinned the palms of my hands and kneecaps. I began to cry so hard that Jeannie picked me up, comforted me and carried me home. Nita continued trick-or-treating without us.

Later, when Nita arrived home bragging about the extra candy she got, I was mad at myself for falling. I went to bed feeling frustrated and angry with Nita.



One frosty fall day as everyone was heading off to school, Mom got me dressed to see Dr. Lang. I didn't mind going to see this doctor because, like Uncle Bobby, he was kind and full of fun. Also, unlike my visits with Dr. Quille, I knew I'd be returning home to my family.

During my visit, Doctor Lang used the same technique as Doctor Quille to check me over, but he talked gently and reassuringly as he squeezed my hands and the bottoms of my feet.

When he finished, I sat and played with his stethoscope while he and Mom chatted and went over a new therapy routine.

Later at home I attempted to walk lengths of our large kitchen, match wooden blocks to similar shapes on paper and lace up an oversized shoe which was similar to the big blue boot at Children's Hospital.

Also, I practiced eating by myself. I used a spoon with a large curved handle and a bowl with sections that made it easier to scoop out food. The easiest thing for me to manage at the time, though, was a two-handled, non-spill drinking cup. I could successfully drink from the hole in its top, seldom making a mess.



Early in the new year of 1961, my sisters, neighbourhood friends and I played endlessly on the high-piled snowbanks lining our street.

In spite of the fun, I always ended up crying because I'd plant a foot too hard and unexpectedly sink like a rock. Luckily, Jeannie would come to my rescue, pull me out and attempt to revive my cold hands.

I hated the cold but loved the snow. It was fun making snowballs for snowball fights, even if I could never squeeze out a perfectly round one.

Ronnie, one of four boys who lived next door, would sometimes grab a hunk of snow and secretly make a perfect snowball for me. Then I'd stagger up to Nita and surprise her with a big snowball to the face. While she recovered and rallied her troops, Ronnie and I would giggle and ready ourselves for a replay.



In the spring, when the soft snow melted away, I had to contend with concrete and pavement. Whenever I took off in an attempt to run down our driveway or street, my feet would become tangled up with each other and down I'd go with a cry of pain.

Since I was well known in the neighbourhood, there was always someone to pick me up, no matter where I fell. Usually, my palms and knees would be scraped and bleeding, so I'd be escorted home.

When I got home, Mom would always have the same expression: a look of love mixed with anger because I had ignored her warnings about running. After she had scolded me, she'd pass me to Jeannie who would clean away the blood and then bandage and comfort me.

When Mom had cooled off she'd sit me on her large lap and say: "Nova, you'd better get used to falling. Because of your CP, it'll happen a lot. Toughen up, and don't come home crying!"

In the month of April, there was a lot of excitement in our home because three of us had birthdays: Flo, Mom and me.

Unfortunately, Flo's birthday party that year didn't begin well for me. As the children were arriving at our kitchen door, two of Flo's classmates, boys from outside our neighbourhood, noticed me in my high chair. My hands were jerking as I tried to bite into a cookie, and they began to laugh.

Jeannie saw them snickering at me and confronted them, yelling: "Don't you know any better? She can't help it; she was born that way. If you pick on her again, you can leave!"

Even though my big sister had stuck up for me, I felt very hurt and hateful. I wished that, instead of scolding them, Jeannie had smashed their noses in.

The party to celebrate my fifth birthday went better, probably

because only neighbourhood friends attended, our gang that hung around together. They accepted me the way I was.

Jeannie led us in all the games. In Pin the Tail on the Donkey, I won – but Jeannie helped a little. She said she was only holding my hands so I wouldn't knock down the other children's tails, but I knew better.

We also played Ring Around the Rosie, Little Sally Saucer, Hide the Button, and Catch the Ball. I ended up having a lot of fun because there was always somebody nearby to steady my hands so that I could win or come close to winning.

The party games were followed by hot dogs, Kool-aid, and cake with ice cream. Mom let me eat birthday cake and ice cream by myself. But what a mess! I had mushy crumbs from the top of my head to the bottoms of my feet and all around me – just like I had been dipped into a gigantic birthday cake.



The summer of 1961 I returned to Children's Hospital, and once again I fought with the nurses, endured straight jackets and longed for my family. The last thing I expected was a miracle, but one came my way. The specialists who worked with me said the time had come for me to begin school.

When I returned to Kimberley, Dr. Lang agreed. Still, my parents were hesitant about me starting school because of my CP. Likewise, the school trustees on our local school board were hesitant; they decided that the only place for me was Pinewood, a one-room school for 'mentally retarded' children. At the time, that was okay with me. I didn't care where I went as long as I could be going to *school*.

Pinewood adjoined Kimberley's junior high school, but

regular students could only visit with special permission. My first day there was awfully frightening. We walked into what seemed an enormous room. At one end was an assortment of desks and a large circular table with chairs all around. Pictures were mounted here and there, some neatly coloured and some just scribbled on, like in my colouring book.

As we continued to survey the room, a grey-haired teacher approached and greeted us. She had a friendly smile and wore a red dress. It was then that I noticed children of various ages playing on a carpet at the other end of the room. A second teacher was supervising them. To my surprise one of the students was Beth, and when I saw her I relaxed a little.

The unfamiliar faces continued to scare me though, especially the older ones. Some students were older than Beth, and some were even older than Flo. And what a mixture! I didn't know the terms at the time, but there were deaf-mutes, children with Down Syndrome and a boy with cerebral palsy who wore hearing aids. There were also some children like Beth – almost adults, but very child-like.

The grey-haired teacher's name was Mrs. Atkins. The first thing she did was show Mom and me where I was to sit. Then, after a brief discussion with Mom, Mrs. Atkins informed us she needed to assist Miss Petrie, the other teacher.

Before I could communicate anything to Mom, she knelt down, kissed me and said, "Now, do what you're told and you'll have fun. I'll see you after school." As Mom left and walked out the door, I felt deserted – like at Children's Hospital.

However, before I had a chance to work myself up into a fit, Mrs. Atkins was back. She placed a crayon in my hand and led me to the circular table where she had placed what seemed an

enormous picture of a farmer and his dog. For a little while, she patiently encouraged me to colour the picture.

But I was more interested in watching others and observing their movements: Beth, her tongue hanging out of her mouth, sat quietly colouring; a deaf boy named Terry sat in his desk swaying back and forth, rubbing his hands together; four bulgy-eyed people about sixteen years old sat in a group at one end of the carpet staring absently at one another and around the room; another teenager (a girl who looked normal) sat at the other end of the carpet playing with a toy truck.

After a while, I got bored and tried to concentrate more fully on colouring the picture Mrs. Atkins had given me. Mrs. Atkins spent a lot of time that day pointing to words in colourful picture books. She also helped me try to connect pencil to paper so I could begin writing, but I had so much trouble coordinating my fingers to grip the pencil that my writing was mostly scribbling. Mrs. Atkins just patted my head and said, "It takes time, dear, but you'll catch on."

As time passed I became well acquainted with everyone. My relationships with the other kids at Pinewood were good because I was interested in and tried to understand their handicaps.

Terry, the boy with CP, wasn't shaky like me. He could colour inside the black lines of pictures, but he'd make the grass purple, trees pink and the sky green. And every time he finished a colour, down went his crayon and he'd rub his hands together.

I thought Reg, who was sixteen and had problems speaking, was pretty smart because he could give horsey rides. As he bounced me on his knee and tried to speak, I was in awe; spit would stick to his top and bottom lip, and I'd never seen anyone do that before. Reg and I grew very close. When our weekly gym

class came around, he'd gently take my hand as we walked down the hall, just in case I fell. Sometimes Sharon, who was about the same age as Reg, would try holding my hand on the way to gym. But even though she seemed nice, she scared me because her voice sounded like a man's. So I stayed close to Reg.

Reg would also help me with my artwork. When I tried to dip a brush in paint, my shaking hands would cause the watery paint to leave the brush before I could get it to paper; but Reg would intervene and hold my hand with his, and together we'd compose a pretty picture.

Many of my other classmates were in their own little worlds. A girl named Cathy, who was big and fat, hugged a small teddy bear for most of the day. Phil was another student about Reg's age. He always seemed to be reading a book and taking notes. I'd have considered Phil just as smart as Reg, but his mouth was always rounded like a horse's. Also, when he got excited his hands would flail wildly, just like mine did when I tried to pick up or reach for an object.

My classmates who had been labeled 'retarded' became my good friends, and in my eyes the word began to have no meaning because these people played, cried and laughed just like I did. I considered them no different from Ronnie and the neighbourhood kids I played with.

Many adults didn't think the way I did. I had a neighbourhood friend named Theresa who refused to accompany me over to Beth's house. She said her mother wouldn't allow her to play with 'those kinds of kids.' She'd then tell me that I was lucky to be able to hang around with her. Theresa's parents tolerated me playing outside with her but wouldn't let me into their house. A few times I did ride in their car, but Theresa's mother would

never talk to me. I quickly got the feeling that because I was different she didn't like me.



Going to school seemed to make time go by more quickly. Before I knew it, Halloween had come and gone, and Christmas was coming fast.

However, unlike me, many of the children in my class weren't excited about the coming of Santa Claus. It was as if they had never heard of him. A few of them did seem to have some understanding of the Christmas season, though. For example, my friend Beth wore a red coat with white trim on the hood that made her look like good old Saint Nick. And Phil said he hoped that Santa would bring him a gun on Christmas Day so he could shoot someone. I didn't like what Phil said; in fact, I hated anyone talking about death.

Even though Christmas wasn't fully understood by many of the children, Mrs. Atkins decided that we'd put on a Christmas play for our parents. The teachers made sure our parts were simple because most of the children had trouble concentrating. They explained to us that it would be a special play because we were special people. I could hardly wait to tell my family because they always talked excitedly whenever my sisters were in school plays.

We only needed a week to practice our Christmas play because the plot was very simple. And with much patience and coaxing from Mrs. Atkins and Miss Petrie, we were able to prepare a pretty good play.

Adorned with a crown and cape, I was Mary holding Jesus, a brand new baby doll. Beth was a winged angel carrying a wand



*My class at Pinewood: Reg is on the left; I am seated centre left, dressed as Mother Mary; Mrs. Atkins is standing far right.*

with a gold star at the end; she stood close by tapping me with her wand, as if to bless me. Terry, Phil and Reg were the three wise men; they walked up to me and placed gifts at my feet. Our remaining classmates surrounded us dressed as barnyard animals; they simply looked on and did as they had been told, which was to remain quiet.

Mom smiled proudly the evening of the performance, and our play was almost as good as Jeannie's, which we'd attended two

weeks earlier. When it was over, everybody told me how much they liked it and how much they enjoyed seeing me as Mary.

Afterwards, there was a party in our classroom to celebrate a successful play and to usher in the Christmas vacation. But before we indulged in juice and cookies, the parents had an opportunity to take photos of us in our costumes. Mom had me sit on a desk behind some of the children so that my ugly black boots wouldn't show. She hated them as much as I did, and if there was any way to hide them, she found it.

Next, Mrs. Atkins announced that it was time for Santa. There was a delay for some reason, and then in Santa came all decked out in red and white, accompanied by Miss Petrie. It wasn't long before Santa was seated and my name was called out. "To Nova, from Reg," Miss Petrie announced as Santa handed her a gift.

I tottered excitedly to Santa who'd reclaimed the gift from Miss Petrie, and he lifted me onto his knee. At that moment I realized Santa wasn't Santa: he was Reg! I could tell by his hearing aide, and my suspicions were soon proven correct. When I reached for my present, my hand jerked and caught hold of Santa's beard, revealing Reg to everyone for a few seconds. Poor Reg! Luckily, few people seemed to notice, but Mom still gave me a dirty look when I returned to her.

After a brief but furious struggle to rip off the wrapping paper, I proudly displayed Reg's gift, a comb set for my dolls. Soon I was too busy with my gift to reveal anything more about Reg's new identity.

When my attention had returned to the party, Mom let me try to eat shortbread by myself, and this was somewhat successful. Juice, however, was another story; I crushed the paper cup Mom handed me and soaked my costume. My drooling of course added

to the wetness, and I was soon so soaked that Mom abruptly wrapped me in her coat, apologized to Mrs. Atkins and Miss Petrie, led me to the door, and we headed for home.



I have wonderful memories of Christmas vacation that year.

Sure, Dad had drunk too much on Christmas Eve, and he and Mom had fought, and I had been endlessly frustrated by one of my gifts, a dart gun into which I could seldom load the darts. Still, Christmas morning had been magical. My sisters woke me in what seemed the middle of the night, and we rushed to our beautifully decorated tree. At first I thought I hadn't received the doll carriage I'd hoped for. But after we had opened a few gifts each, Mom asked Jeannie to take me upstairs. My sister carried me to the closet that had big doors I could never get opened. Then she put me down and opened both doors at once, revealing a shiny blue baby buggy. I latched onto it and looked up at Jeannie.

She smiled, and I said, "Boy ... I knew ... San'a-woud-n't ... for-get!"

I carried my dolls and toys around in that buggy for the rest of the holidays.

New Year's Day, 1962, is also fresh in my memory, especially because I got to wear a brand new dress I had been given for Christmas. Nita had received the same dress, and we'd have looked like twins except that she had pretty socks and shoes while I had my big ugly boots with socks that fell to my ankles. But I didn't care, and everyone in my family told me I was just as pretty in my dress.



Even though it had been a great vacation, I was overjoyed to return to school. We learned a new song the first day back. I loved it, and it went like this:

*January, January, month of ice and snow,  
January, January, soon the snow will go.*

Mrs. Atkins played the piano, and all of us sat around her and sang. Actually, I just hummed because Mom had told me that it was better if I hummed instead of sang. She never said why, but I did as I was told.

Most of my classmates couldn't sing in tune, but they never seemed to care. It sounded funny when they sang, but they enjoyed accompanying Mrs. Atkins. Terry, the boy who was always rubbing his hands together, just sat and watched us. He couldn't sing or even hear, so I didn't blame him for rubbing his hands together. What else could he do? Sometimes we got to accompany with homemade percussion instruments. They were fun but whenever I tried to strike two of them together, I'd end up hitting myself. So instead, I mostly used my hands for clapping.

Winter was coming to a close when a class from the junior high school accompanied our special class to the ski hill for toboggan rides. We were to be well looked after: two junior high students for each of us. And as it turned out, two of Jeannie's best friends, Margaret and Yvonne, chose to chaperone me.

After arriving at the hill, the ski patrol led us to a small slope where we could enjoy our tobogganing. Since it was very difficult for me to hike up the slope, I sat on the long sled while my two escorts pulled me to the top. Then, with me snugly sandwiched, the three of us sped to the bottom of the slope, giggling all the way down. Our final runs of the day were the most fun of all because we challenged our fellow tobogganers to races.

Before heading back to school, we gathered in the ski lodge for some snacks and hot chocolate. Unfortunately, Margaret and Yvonne forgot that I needed help drinking liquids. They got me settled into a high chair, set a donut and Styrofoam cup full of hot chocolate in front of me, and then headed off to visit some friends. I was thirsty and the hot chocolate smelled delicious, so I made a shaky grab for the cup. In a few seconds, I was screaming because of the hotness spilling onto my hand. Even worse, my next reflex was to crush the cup, and this sent the rest of the hot liquid splashing all over me. I began to scream even louder, in pain and fear. Luckily, the hot chocolate had cooled a little before I grabbed it and I wasn't seriously burned; it was only hot enough to make my skin a little redder than it already was from the cold. Mrs. Atkins was the first to arrive on the scene; she rushed me to the bathroom to calm me down and clean me up.



We participated in a number of activities with the same junior high class, usually in the huge gym inside the school. Under the direction of our teachers, these students involved us mostly in ball games and races. Because of my uncoordinated legs, I couldn't participate in the relay races. As soon as I tried to break into a run, my right leg would get tangled up with my left leg and down I'd go onto the hard slippery floor. So most of the time, Margaret or Yvonne would carry me.

Likewise, I had trouble throwing and catching a ball. Often, it was difficult for me just to hold on to a ball, let alone throw or catch one. And if I did manage to hang on long enough to toss one, it never went the way I wanted. So my partners, mostly

Margaret, would hold and guide my hands as I attempted to play catch with others.

One day while we were enjoying our gym class I saw the school principal talking to Mrs. Atkins and pointing in my direction. At the end of the day she put a note for my parents into my lunch box. "This is important, Nova," she said tenderly.

When I arrived home that day, the first thing I did was hand Mom the note. She explained, "It says that because the gym floors are slippery and your black boots scuff the floor, we must buy you some running shoes."

Actually, the note was great news to me. I was ecstatic because I had always wanted runners like other kids. There was one problem, though: I had been told that the only shoes I could wear were my ugly black boots. Mom phoned Dr. Lang to see what she should do. She knew it wouldn't be fair if I had to miss gym class.

When we went to see Dr. Lang, he checked my feet and legs and walked me back and forth in his office; then, as usual, he and Mom had a talk. As we left his office, Mom gave me the verdict. "Let's go buy you some running shoes!" she said, smiling broadly. I couldn't believe my luck. I was so thrilled that I pulled at Mom and tried to break into a run. But she began to get angry with me and told me to calm down.

In the shoe department of the Hudson Bay, I remember being mesmerized by all the runners. There were so many different kinds: white ones and red ones and blue ones, some with stripes or even Bugs Bunny on them. One kind even had the words 'left' and 'right' written on them in big letters so you would know which foot to put each one on. I stood and stared, deciding which ones I'd like. However, I noticed that Mom had gone over to

the boys' section and was looking at some ugly black and white runners that almost looked as bad as my ugly black army boots.

"Nova, Dr. Lang said these are the only kind that will fit your feet and stay comfortable," she explained. "It's either these or nothing." Her voice was very loud, firm and cross, and people around us began to stare. I hated the thought of not attending gym class, so I had no choice. We ended up buying boys' runners without me even trying them on. Mom was too afraid I might cause a scene.

Even though I wasn't thrilled with our purchase, it didn't take long for me to feel excited once more. After all, I finally had my own pair of runners. However, my tiny bubble of joy soon popped. When we got home and I tried on my new runners, my sisters burst out laughing. They said they made me look like Bozo the Clown. I must have looked terribly hurt because Jeannie immediately apologized for laughing. She told me that the runners actually looked good on me, only they were a little big. "Nobody at school will laugh at your runners, Nova. They won't even notice," she assured me.

I believed Jeannie because one thing that the kids in my school didn't do was laugh at each other. When somebody did something funny or awkward, everybody laughed (including that person) or nobody did.

When I attended my next gym class, I wore those runners. Sure enough, not a soul laughed. I told myself that even if they were ugly, at least they were doing the job they were intended for, and that was the main thing.

Every weekday, I looked forward to heading off to school. And if there was nothing to do when the weekend arrived, I'd think of school. I'd think of how nice it would be to play once

again with all of the so-called ‘retarded kids’ who were becoming my friends and a meaningful part of my world. I didn’t realize it then, but I was learning just as much from my classmates as from Jeannie, Mom, and the rest of my family.

As my first year of school came to a close, everyone became excited about the places their parents were taking them during the summer holidays.

The upcoming summer was going to be an especially exciting one for my eldest sister, Flo. She was going on her own to visit my aunt and uncle in Manitoba. Of course I’d have to return to Children’s Hospital in Vancouver, and that was certainly nothing to look forward to. I’d rather have gone anywhere than back to Children’s Hospital. But no matter how many temper tantrums I had or how long I cried, I couldn’t get out of it. I had to go.

Gently and sympathetically, Mom would try to explain it was for my own good, and that it would help me. But I still hated to go! Sometimes, I felt as though the real reason I was sent to Children’s Hospital was because my mother and father didn’t want me around; I felt they sent me to Vancouver to get rid of me. But Jeannie assured me they didn’t like sending me there any more than I liked going.

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## CHAPTER 3

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I made my next trip to Children’s Hospital by Greyhound bus early in the summer of 1962. As usual, Mom took me and Dad stayed home with my sisters.

Even though I slept most of the way to Vancouver, I remember having a terrible earache going through the mountain passes of the Fraser Canyon. Mom encouraged me to swallow so that my ears would pop and relieve the pressure. But swallowing wasn’t natural for me because of my CP; I could never remember to do it, which was why I drooled. Because swallowing was so troublesome, I got no relief from my earache. It was easier for me to fall asleep to escape the pain than to force myself to swallow, and that’s what I remember doing. After an all-night ride, we arrived at the Vancouver bus depot with the sun beginning to rise. As our bus pulled into its parking bay, through the window I spotted Uncle Bobby, my favourite, waving and smiling on the passenger platform. Mom collected our luggage, but I couldn’t wait. Like a pinball, I madly bumped my way off people and seats to the front of the bus, then hobbled down the exit steps toward my uncle. Before I could fall headlong out the open door

of the bus, I was gathered into my uncle's arms, and I was kissing his neck and hugging him.

We stayed with Uncle Bobby all day and once more spent the night at his apartment. That night I again slept close to Mom. When she kissed me good night, she whispered, "Please don't be afraid and make a scene at the hospital tomorrow, Nova." Her words made me feel cold, so I snuggled closer to her and fell asleep.

After breakfast the next morning, my uncle bounced me on his knee, tickling and teasing me as usual. Then he said, "There are a lot of cousins I'd like you to meet, Nova. I'll bring them to visit you at the hospital." Again, the mention of going to the hospital gave me a chilly feeling inside.

Mostly, I kept my misgivings about another stay at Children's Hospital to myself, but on our way there I said to Mom, "You-gonna' ... lea'-me-there ... a-gain ... aren't-you?"

"I have to, Nova. I have to get back to your Dad and sisters," she answered. It was the same old line.



For the next week at Children's Hospital, I went through my customary crying and tantrums. But this time I was over the initial torment much sooner, and I warmed up more quickly to other children, their parents and some of the hospital staff.

My days included play sessions, therapy, the odd visit from a relative, and two hours of instructional time that was just like school. I guess because I had started school at home, I was given a chance to develop academic skills the teachers at Pinewood didn't teach; for example, I learned to count by threes, fours and fives instead of the usual ones and twos.

We did a lot of artwork, too. Unfortunately, I made a mess of the pictures and an even bigger mess of myself; it was the same as when I painted in Mrs. Atkins' class at home. Whether it was finger painting or trying to paint with a brush, my hands would jerk and paint would fly everywhere. Or just as bad, some other part of me would jerk and I'd knock a jar of paint over onto the floor. So even though I wore a painting smock, I always ended up being washed from head to toe after art activities.

Still, I loved finger painting. I especially loved dipping my fingers into the bright paints; they felt cool and gushy, like slimy snow.

Unlike Mrs. Atkins and Mrs. Petrie, at least the art teachers at Children's Hospital didn't try to convince me that colouring with crayons was my best talent so that they wouldn't have to clean up my mess. They even set aside my best paintings and sent them home to my family.

My coordination improved that summer. The physiotherapist explained to me that I was getting better at controlling my movements. I still couldn't handle small objects, and if I tried to walk too quickly my feet would still get tangled and down I'd go. But when I rode the special kind of trike the therapist had, my feet didn't get stuck in the spokes like they did in my trike at home.

I liked how the staff at Children's Hospital treated me just like any other kid. The only exception was that I had to wear a bib at mealtimes and one of the nurses or aides would feed me. I'd practice feeding myself in therapy, but otherwise I was fed.

Even though this stay at Children's Hospital was going better than previous visits, there were still occasional upsets.

I can recall one night when I became especially lonely for my mother and other members of my family. After crying for

Mom for a long while, I got out of bed, opened the door of my room, made sure there were no nurses around, and then hobbled toward the gate at the end of the hall. I was just about to make my escape when Mrs. Goodwin, the head nurse, emerged from a nearby room and caught sight of me. In a flash, she grabbed on to me and picked me up.

I screamed, “I-wan’-to ... go-hom’!”

But Mrs. Goodwin didn’t let go of me, even though I struggled furiously by kicking my feet and waving my hands. She called another nurse for help, and together they put me in a straight jacket and forced a pill down my throat. Back in my room, they stood over me as I lay in my bed shivering and whimpering for my mother, but soon I fell asleep.

Another time, I bit a nurse and a doctor as they tried to stop me from running toward the gate. And many other times, when the desire to see my family overwhelmed me, I threw books, crayons and toys.



One special day, Uncle Bobby came to visit and brought along his girlfriend, Muriel, and her daughter, Monica. They entered my room with a basket of fruit and a vase filled with beautiful flowers. I was touched because nobody had ever presented me with such gifts. Monica was in her late teens or early twenties. She and her mother were just like my uncle, gentle and kind. If I tired and stumbled as one of them was taking me for a walk down the hall, I’d be delicately picked up and carried back to bed. Their words and actions were never rough or harsh.

Before they left, they took off my ugly boots and gave me a bubble bath. Besides being fun for me, the nurses loved it. I

always soaked them more than myself when they tried to bathe me. This time, because I liked Muriel and Monica, I behaved myself.

After the bath, Muriel read me a story as I lay in bed. Monica tidied up the dresser and folded and put away my clothes. Soon I was falling asleep, feeling each of them kissing me on the cheek good-bye.



Time passed slowly, like all my stays at Children's Hospital. Every second day Dr. Quille would visit my room to give me my usual check-up. He always had jelly beans or a lollipop with him. After putting a lot of cold tools on my body, exercising my muscles like they did in therapy and sometimes scolding me for drooling, he'd leave me with a treat and big wave good-bye.

Finally the day arrived when Dr. Quille informed me I'd be heading home soon. However, a couple of days later I was perplexed when Uncle Bobby arrived with Auntie Joey, my father's youngest sister. Mom hadn't come to escort me home. My uncle explained that he had decided to visit my family, and so he was going to drive me to Kimberley the next morning. That night, we'd be staying with Auntie Joey. I was very disappointed that Mom hadn't come, but I soon became excited about staying at my aunt's house. And of course my release from Children's Hospital also helped to ease my letdown.

As Uncle Bobby and Auntie Joey signed me out, I went from excited to ecstatic. In fact, the nurses told me that I had a bigger smile on my face than I had worn all summer. I said good-bye to them all, grabbed my uncle and aunt each by a hand, and practically dragged them out.

I had visited Auntie Joey's before with Mom, however we had never stayed overnight. My aunt's house was immaculate, like something you would see in a magazine. There were rugs from wall to wall, fancy furniture that always seemed to look brand new, pretty paintings, and everywhere you looked there were breakable treasures. There was even a different smell from our house, a smell so clean it was hard to believe that Auntie Joey's husband and two children also lived there.

When Mom and I had visited, she always kept me close to prevent me from breaking something or getting fingerprints on the walls. Mostly we had visited my aunt, uncle and cousins in their kitchen. That's exactly what Uncle Bobby and I did when we arrived there from Children's Hospital.

I don't remember much else of that visit, except that I slept on a wonderfully comfortable bed under a soft and puffy comforter.

Morning came very quickly, and before I knew it, Uncle Bobby and I were climbing into his car and waving good-bye to my aunt and her family.

My uncle's car was an English one, similar in size to a Volkswagen beetle. I sat in the passenger seat right next to him. Our journey to Kimberley led us through many mountain passes, where it was so hot that my uncle had to drive with the windows open. It was the kind of heat that makes your mouth parched.

Just like the bus trip to Vancouver, my ears began to hurt. Thinking that drinking something might relieve the building pressure in my ears and quench my thirst at the same time, I made a grab for an open can of Coke resting on the flat dashboard. But a hand spasm knocked it over instead.

"What are you trying to prove?" my uncle shouted.

It was the first time he'd ever yelled at me, but it wasn't

because I had spilled a can of Coke. I think Uncle Bobby was afraid that I could have just as easily hit the steering wheel and caused an accident.

My uncle's scolding hurt. Even though I slept on and off afterwards, it was more the ache in my *heart* than my aching ears that made for fitful sleep.

Late in the evening, Uncle Bobby and I arrived in Kimberley and soon were turning into our driveway. Jeannie was the first to come running out and greet me. Before long, the whole family – except for Dad – was out hugging and kissing me. Finally, Mom picked me up, held me closely in her arms, and with everyone else following, carried me into the house.

My Dad was nowhere in sight. When I asked Mom where he was, she responded, "Where else? His second home, the beer parlour." But she then quickly changed the subject by asking me all about my stay at Children's Hospital.



In the few weeks that passed before school started, a lot seemed to happen to remind me how different I was from other children in Kimberley. At Children's Hospital, I felt as though I belonged. I belonged to a group of children with similar kinds of handicaps, but I belonged. In the real world, I didn't seem to belong.

As usual I spent a lot of time playing and hanging around with my sisters and our neighbourhood gang, especially Maxine Reed and my next door neighbour, Ronnie. The swimming pool was a frequent destination. We'd gather a crowd and head there full of excitement. Sometimes, in our rush to get there, I'd fall and skin my knees, but my adopted brother Ronnie would pick

me up and carry me the rest of the way. Then, upon our arrival at the pool, one of the lifeguards would bandage me up.

The hot summer days just before school started always meant a huge crowd at the pool. I loved going there but was still afraid to go in the water by myself, especially because it was hard to keep an eye on the people I came with. Instead I'd wait on the pool deck until Maxine or Ronnie had their swim, and then one of them would carry me through the water.

One day, instead of waiting for someone to take me in, I wandered around the pool grounds looking for money or bottles to exchange at the corner store nearby. Near the changing room doors, I ambled through a cluster of kids who stared at me. One of them yelled out, "Hey, retard!"

I went a bit farther, managed to bend over and pick up a stone, and then threw it in their direction. That made the whole gang rush at me. Luckily, just then, a lifeguard came out of the boys' changing room. I recognized him as a high school student who had worked with our special class at Pinewood. His name was Joe. I latched onto him and stammered, "They ... gon-na ... beat-me-up."

"What's going on here?" he blared at the others.

"She threw a rock at us!" one of the older girls shouted.

"Nova, did you?" Joe asked.

"They-call ... me-names; Mom-tol'-me ... to hit ... any-one ... who-call ... me-names."

"Why don't you wait on the pool deck, Nova?" And then he gave me a little push to send me on my way.

As I trudged toward the door of the girls' changing room, I looked back and some of the kids were mocking my movements

as the rest laughed. Even Joe, standing among them, was laughing. This time, instead of feeling anger, I cried.

I managed to find my way through the girls' changing room to the pool deck, and it wasn't long before Ronnie noticed me wandering about in tears. He picked me up, hugged me, and asked, "What's the matter?"

As I explained what had happened, Ronnie tried to comfort me. He even told me that if he ever caught anyone teasing me again, he'd break one of their arms. This gave me an excited feeling inside and slowly my crying ceased.

However, there were many times when Ronnie or other friends or members of my family weren't around to protect me. For example, a few days later, as I roamed the pool grounds, I found a dime, enough to buy plenty of candy. I managed to pocket the dime and then made my way to the nearby corner store. However, I neglected to tell anyone where I had gone: I was too excited about my find and the candy to come!

As I arrived at the corner store and tried to go up the few steps leading to the door, my legs got tangled up and down I went. Since I was always falling, the first thing I did was look at my palms: no blood. Next, my knees: no blood. "Thank goodness," I thought, because my mother had a fit whenever I came home with anything bloody.

I struggled to my feet and entered the store, only to face a crowd of kids I had never seen before. They must have noticed my approach and fall because they were already pointing at me and snickering as I entered. My mother had actually told me to first ignore people who made fun of me, only hitting back physically as a last resort. This time I tried to pay no attention to my tormentors. I hobbled right past them and up to the counter.

I fumbled in my pocket for the dime, grasped it, and managed to drop it onto the counter. Then I asked the store clerk, “Co’ ... I-ha’ ... ten-cen’-wor’ ... bla’-juju’ ... plea’?”

The clerk, a pretty young woman in her twenties, must have remembered me coming in previously with my sisters. She smiled, proceeded to scoop a generous helping of black jujubes into a little brown paper bag, and handed it to me.

I grasped it as tightly as I could with my steadier right hand and then turned and headed for the door. Before I reached the door, I was confused because behind me I heard words similar to those I’d just spoken to the clerk. I stopped, turned around, and noticed that a fat, dark-haired boy had gone up to the clerk to repeat what I’d said. He purposely mumbled his words and flailed his arms, and all the kids with him laughed loudly at his impersonation. The clerk was laughing, too: I guess she couldn’t help herself.

I felt like going up and kicking him in the shins, but I stared deep and angrily into his eyes instead. It was no use. The laughter continued and got even louder. I couldn’t bear the ridicule any longer, so I attempted to hurl the whole bag of jujubes in his direction. As I did, the bag split open and my hoard of treasure scattered onto the floor, followed immediately by more laughter.

I don’t remember much after that except that I didn’t return to the pool and I was crying as I stumbled up our front steps. My mother was home, but she had little sympathy for me.

“You’d better get used to ignorant kids like that,” she said. “Like I told you, Nova, ignore them. If that doesn’t work, punch them if you have to. But whatever you do, don’t cry. That’ll please them, and make them tease you even more.”

Jeannie was home, too. I remember her hugging and then tickling me to help me forget.



During the summer days that remained, there were other negative experiences with rude people of different ages. While my confidence suffered, nobody ever broke my will to fight back. If someone my own size and age was harassing me, one way or another I'd deal with the person myself. If the person was bigger or older, I'd memorize his or her face and disclose the incident to one of my sisters, neighbourhood allies, or parents.

As summer vacation ended, I made a vow: *never again was anybody going to get away with hurting my feelings.*

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## CHAPTER 4

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**B**efore I knew it I was back at Pinewood for my second year with Mrs. Atkins and Miss Petrie. Little had changed since the end of June, and our special class quickly resumed its regular routines and activities. I noticed right away that there were a couple of new people. I also noticed that Reg was gone.

“Wher’s-Reg?” I asked Mrs. Atkins.

“Gone, dear. He’s moved to a different school,” she explained.

This was disheartening because Reg had been my main helper. *Who will help me now?* I wondered.

When I told my parents my bad news, they assured me that other children could take over. But in my mind nobody could replace Reg.

That entire school year – grade one had I been in a regular school – I missed Reg every day. But I never saw him again.

Even though Reg was no longer a part of my school life, there was a primary supervising teacher named Mrs. Legget who visited Pinewood regularly, and she took a special interest in me. She was a tall lady who told funny jokes and made funny faces. Also, she could see right away that doing the same work as the year before was boring for me. So instead, she taught

more challenging kinds of arithmetic: demonstrating how to solve simple equations with blocks, for example. Or she'd take me aside and read aloud from a book that would have been too difficult for any of my classmates to follow. Like Uncle Bobby, Mrs. Legget was genuinely interested in helping me overcome my disability.

Another thing she did was give me speech therapy for the first time. All I had to do was sit down face to face with her and repeat words like shout, shed, see, saw, look, like, and long. People always said it was difficult to understand my speech, which was odd because to my ears I sounded like everyone else. Mrs. Legget patiently encouraged me during our sessions and would even give praise though I wasn't pronouncing the words perfectly.

I also remember Mrs. Legget walking me up and down the hall for what seemed hours on end, helping me to walk a straight line. And when we had recess or lunch, she'd always sit nearby. She'd fill my cup a little at a time so I could drink by myself with less chance of spilling. If I had a severe spastic reaction and spilled my milk or juice, she'd quickly clean up and urge me to keep on trying.

But Mrs. Legget could be very firm with me, too. One day, as I hobbled home from school, two little boys ran right up on either side of me and mimicked my walk. I felt a wave of intense anger and I surprised them – and myself – when I managed on the first try to grab them each by the collar. “Take-th-is!” I screamed, and I bashed their heads together.

Even though the boys' mothers said “Good for you!” when I later had to explain my actions, Mrs. Legget wasn't at all amused. When I told her about the incident, she shook her head ominously. “Nova, that was the wrong way to show your anger. Never do

it again. I'm very disappointed in you.” That hurt me and Mrs. Legget knew it. Still, I respected her honesty and toughness.

Another time I got mad at a classmate for not sharing a trike. When he refused to give it to me, I kicked him in the legs and punched him in the head so hard his hearing aid fell out. Mrs. Legget witnessed the whole thing and immediately took me over her knee and paddled my behind until I cried. She then sent me to a little time-out closet where I sometimes went for naps, and I yelled and sobbed for what seemed like hours. When I settled down, Mrs. Legget made me apologize to the boy and told me I couldn't ride the trike for a week. I ended up with even harsher punishment than I'd have received at home, but Mrs. Legget had no patience for my temper.



In September 1963, the start of my third year at Pinewood, a teacher's aide was hired. Her name was Mrs. Baglot, another no-nonsense woman who would not stand for any of my shenanigans. And even though we didn't get along very well at the start, she won my respect and I became very fond of her.

One incident I remember was when some high school bullies cornered a couple of my classmates and me against the fence at the far end of the schoolyard. All big boys, they pushed us down and then mocked our movements as we tried to get up. From out of nowhere, Mrs. Baglot arrived on the scene. She grabbed the biggest one firmly by the ear and thundered, “Just what are you boys trying to prove?!” She didn't stop there, but continued to scold them fiercely: “You ought to be ashamed for picking on kids smaller and less fortunate than yourselves! Apologize, right now!” Then she shouted, “Off you go!”

They went, too, and in a hurry.

From then on I saw Mrs. Baglot as a hero. She was a woman who was tough enough to scare off bullies and make them want to get away quickly!

She was strict with me, too, but in a way I didn't mind because she was always fair. When I did something wrong or got into trouble, she punished me; when I did something well, she praised me. Unlike many people who overdid praise, she just said "Good" or "Very well done" and left it at that. I always felt she was being sincere.

Mrs. Baglot left Pinewood just before Christmas break. While she had been there, I hadn't fought or fooled around nearly as much. Under her watchful eye, I had done my schoolwork, shared properly with my classmates, and cried out my frustrations instead of taking them out on others.

When she left, I missed her. But I remembered that she hated fighting and other kinds of nonsense, so I tried to behave.

During the Christmas holidays, I discovered that Mrs. Baglot lived on Sixth Avenue. We lived a few minutes away on Fifth. Sometimes, as I was playing alone or with friends outside, she'd drive by and honk.

Later on in the New Year when I had mustered up enough nerve, I trudged quite a few times through the snow over to her house. I talked to her if she was outside, but I never went in. Mom told me she had a husband and four children of her own and warned me not to bother her too much.



One spring day Nita came home to say that Mrs. Baglot had just taken over the special needs class at her school. She explained

that this class wasn't like ours at Pinewood. The kids had learning troubles or other disabilities, but they weren't like the kids at Pinewood: they wouldn't always be like small children, never progressing.

*That's the class for me!* I thought. I knew I could make good progress there if given a chance, especially if Mrs. Baglot was helping me.

Someone must have been looking out for me, probably Mrs. Baglot, because at the end of June 1964, Mrs. Atkins sat me down and said, "Nova, you won't be coming back to Pinewood in the fall. Do you remember Mrs. Baglot? Well, next year you'll be going to A.A. Watkins Elementary School, and she'll be your teacher."

I was speechless, and suddenly very confused. On the one hand, I was overjoyed at the thought of being with Mrs. Baglot and attending the same school as Nita. But on the other hand, I would be leaving the classmates I had become so close to during my three years at Pinewood, and I felt as though I was deserting them. All in all, I felt terrified by the prospect of such a big step.

*Oh well,* I thought, trying to be brave, *at least I have all summer in Children's Hospital to think about it.*



My fifth summer of therapy at Children's Hospital was pretty much the same routine as always, with two exceptions. First of all, feeding myself was to become a regular part of my therapy. Second, I was moved to a new ward, a huge room with about 30 beds occupied by children of all ages who were temporarily sick, not permanently handicapped.

That summer, at eight years of age, I realized that it didn't

matter where I was – in our home neighbourhood, at school, or even in Children’s Hospital – there was always someone, big or small, who would mock me. Whether they focused on the way I walked or the way I talked or some other disability, it didn’t matter: it always hurt. I kept my vow to stand up to the insensitivity of others; but as a result I got into more and more fights.

One evening soon after I arrived at Children’s Hospital, I got into a big brawl with a boy in the bed next to me. It was supertime, and he encouraged everyone to watch me struggle with the food on my tray. Pretty soon every kid in the ward was in stitches.

At mealtimes I did my best to eat among the others without making too much of a mess. This time, however, so many kids sharing a laugh at my expense racked my nerves; spasms made my arms flail and my hands shook worse than ever.

For a time I tried to proudly ignore the laughter, but then my troublemaking neighbour leaned over with a sneer and said, “It makes me sick to watch you eat.”

The time had come to fight; I scooped a handful of steaming mashed potatoes and threw them into his face. He shrieked bloody murder, and the fight was on.

The brute was at least a foot taller than me, but I wasn’t afraid. As he rolled off his bed over to mine, swinging his fist toward my stomach, my legs spasmed and I kicked him in the head. A second left heel to his temple triggered another dreadful scream, and very soon a nurse arrived on the scene.

“What’s going on here!?” she screeched.

“I was just eating my dinner and she went crazy and started throwing food and kicking me,” he whimpered.

“Tha’-a ... lie!” I cried.

But the rest of the kids in the room said it was me who was lying, that he hadn't done a thing. The nurse ended up believing the others, I guess because there were so many people saying the same thing and my attacker was in obvious pain.

As she took over feeding me, the nurse said, "Nova, as punishment for causing trouble, you cannot watch TV tonight. You can stay in bed."

Later on that evening, I cried in my hospital bed for my mother, something I hadn't done for a few years. It hurt so much to have been both tormented and not believed, and my anger, with nowhere to go, was almost unbearable. My mother would have been sympathetic; she'd have known I was telling the truth and the others were lying.

In the TV lounge nearby, I could hear my enemy and his allies chortling over some cartoon. Meanwhile, I cried softly in my bed.



My stay at Children's Hospital went by slower than ever that summer, so when I finally returned to Kimberley, I was eager to enjoy the rest of the summer getting reacquainted with my family and friends. *After all, I thought, in one short week I'll be heading back to school: not Pinewood, but real school!*

Life at home, though, was no paradise. As I had lain night after night in Children's Hospital, I had recalled a more affectionate place. I wasn't home for long before I was reminded that there wasn't always love in our house.

If I dropped a glass of milk or had a spastic attack that sent my dinner dish flying or tripped and knocked a coffee table over, Mom still yelled at me. If she was in an exceptionally bad mood,

she still swore at me or hit me. Even though therapy at Children's Hospital was improving my coordination, my parents never let me forget that I was still a challenge to look after.

Furthermore, Nita and I sometimes argued or scrapped over the smallest things; and Flo and Mom had the odd fight. And of course the Friday and Saturday night battles between Mom and Dad, once he arrived home from the Canadian Hotel bar, began again.

Thank goodness for tender, gentle Jeannie. If I became too upset, she was there for comfort. She could still hug all of me closely and rock me – so that I could fall asleep in her arms.

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## CHAPTER 5

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The start of school was always exciting, but by the end of August 1964, I was beside myself with a mixture of nervousness and fear. My parents and sisters talked constantly about how things would be for me at elementary school. We chatted a lot about the people I would meet, and they reassured me that there was nothing to be afraid of.

Jeannie tried to describe Mrs. Baglot’s ungraded special class. “Nova, it’s not like Pinewood, but it’s not like Nita’s grade five class either. The kids in Mrs. Baglot’s class are slower learners, but they aren’t retarded.” This was difficult for me to completely understand, but she told me that I’d soon know what she meant and went on to explain how lunch breaks would work: “You won’t be separated from the other kids in the school. You’ll have lunch with everyone!”

Mom warned that there would be kids who would tease me like the kids at the hospital, swimming pool and corner store did. “You’ll have to try to ignore them, Nova. You won’t be able to fight as much at this school.” But she also said that I’d make new friends, ones that would want to stick up for me.

Pretty soon the big morning arrived, and Mom was getting me ready for my first day of elementary school.

Nita, who was ten years old, wanted to walk with her friends, so she skipped out the door ahead of us. Jeannie and Flo, both attending the high school where Pinewood was located, were in the middle of ‘putting on their faces’ but stopped long enough to see Mom and me to the door.

“Don’t you look pretty!” said Flo before we left.

“Good luck,” said Jeannie, giving my hand a squeeze. “I’m so proud of you.”

When Mom and I arrived at A.A. Watkins, there were hundreds of kids milling about the playground that led to its entrance. Some were skipping or playing hopscotch, some were chatting in groups, and quite a few were staring at me.

Holding Mom’s hand tightly and closely, I shuffled along with great concentration, fighting with every muscle to control my spastic steps.

Mom whispered, “Just keep your head up; don’t pay attention to them.” And we soldiered on up to the entrance.

As we passed through the front doors and entered the hallway, I noticed that every surface in the place was either freshly painted or spotlessly clean. Then a bell rang, and almost immediately a steady stream of kids began pushing past us. About five kids would pass for every step I took, and almost all of them glanced back. Some burst out laughing, but most just stared. Mom gave more than a few dirty looks as we made our way toward the office.

The principal must have been expecting us because he approached before we reached the office door, saying, “This way, Mrs. Bannatyne.”

I was surprised when he led us down two long hallways to the back of the school and outside again. He then pointed to a dilapidated building with peeling yellow paint. It reminded me of the one-room schoolhouse I had seen at the Fort Steele pioneer village. "It's in there," was all he said, and he left.

A second bell rang as Mom and I reached the open door of Mrs. Baglot's classroom. Inside, I spotted about eighteen students seated in desks of various sizes. The class, like at Pinewood, was a mix of ages, from about seven to sixteen. At eight years old, it looked like I was going to be one of the youngest.

When Mom handed me over to Mrs. Baglot, all eyes turned upon us. The children seemed shocked by something, and I suppose it was my physical appearance and wobbly way of moving. They looked as though the creature from the Lost Lagoon had just walked into their room.

Paralyzing fear began to grow inside me, but before I became completely incapacitated, Mom said, "See you in an hour," and Mrs. Baglot led me to an empty little desk at the front of the classroom.

Mrs. Baglot got right down to business. First, she asked us all to stand and introduce ourselves.

When my turn came, I struggled up, and as clearly as I could uttered my first and last name: "No-va ... Ban-na-tyne."

Because of my garbled speech, more than half the class started to laugh. Mrs. Baglot was going to have none of it. She pounded her fist onto her desk, took time to give every offender a stern look, and repeated my name loudly: "NOVA! ... BANNATYNE!"

After that, no one was ever likely to forget it.

Next, Mrs. Baglot asked the class to copy a supplies list from

the board. I didn't have a pencil and paper, and it was almost impossible for me to write anyway, so Mrs. Baglot copied the list for me. But when she handed me the list, I saw a familiar look in her eyes. It was the look she gave me at Pinewood when I goofed off or disturbed others.

"I did it for you this time, Nova. But from now on, you'll be doing as much of your own work as possible."

I could tell by her voice there was a slave driver in this person, and if I wasn't in line she'd soon put me there.

It was hard to get used to A.A. Watkins. There were so many faces I'd never seen. At recess and lunch, the children running this way and that way around the playgrounds made me dizzy.

For the first weeks, I played with Nita and our neighbourhood gang. However, my neighbour Ronnie and the other boys treated me differently; Ronnie spoke to me, but without a smile, and the others acted like they'd never seen me before.

In Pinewood I had been treated as an equal, and we had never mocked one another; but at this school, I soon became a target for steady ridicule. It seemed that whenever I tried to make my way from place to place, children would mimic my unsteadiness or call out: "Hey, retard!" or "Weirdo!" or "Slobber-puss!" I could never wander anywhere without being stared at.

Girls weren't as cruel to me, because Nita was often around. But the boys, especially the older ones, were relentless. Sometimes there would be a trail of them, mocking my every misstep.

I'd turn on them and shout, "Lea-me ... a-lone!" But it was no use. They'd copy my words, making sure they twisted their mouths about and slurred their speech. I'd end up crying to Nita,

and contrary to my mother's warnings, she'd encourage me to fight or throw rocks – and I did.

But no matter how many fists or stones I threw, there was always someone around the next corner of the schoolyard to remind me of my handicap.



Fortunately, my lessons were interesting, and I liked how Mrs. Baglot made us take them seriously. She'd say: "If you don't want to learn, you might as well go live on the streets!" And if we didn't understand a lesson, she'd make us work on it until we did.

The biggest difference between my new class and Pinewood was that learning mattered. Mrs. Baglot insisted we do our best. She'd work hard to make a subject fun, and I loved how she'd tell humorous stories to spice up a lesson.

Because of Mrs. Baglot's personality and dedication, we all liked her and were willing to try hard to please.

My classmates and I soon became well acquainted, and as the school year got under way they came to understand my condition. Before long, if I had difficulties preparing for art lessons or putting on my winter coat, one of them was there to lend a hand.

The hardest thing to adapt to, though, was always being the last one finished. Because I had problems coordinating my pencil, the others finished their assignments much faster than I did. Further, my scribbled printing and attempts at handwriting were seldom readable. Still, by working one-on-one with Mrs. Baglot and speaking out my answers, I managed to keep up.

Near the end of September, I remember Mrs. Baglot announcing: "Next month I'd like to try teams."

*What kind of teams?* I wondered.

“It’ll work like this,” she went on. “The class will be divided into two teams. Whoever performs well in any subject will earn points for their team. At the end of October, I’ll reward the team with the most points. Also, the highest scorer on each team will receive a prize. Every month we’ll form new teams.”

She then appointed two older students as captains, and they took turns picking their teams. It didn’t take long before another girl and I were facing the rest, the last ones to be picked. I wasn’t surprised when she was selected second last, and I joined the remaining team, the last one picked.

My team didn’t seem very happy about having me on their side. After all, their impression was that I was slow at my lessons. Also, during P.E. [Physical Education class] games, I fell when I ran, or I threw the ball in the wrong direction.

Then and there I vowed that the next time teams were picked, I would not be the last one chosen. In fact, each side would be fighting to have me! Jeannie had always told me that I was just as good as anyone else, and this competition was my chance to prove it!

School became more interesting each day. I loved to learn, and my classmates soon suspected I was smarter than I appeared. And while nobody fought for me the next time teams were picked, at least I was spared the humiliation of being picked last.

Even though Mrs. Baglot’s team idea and some of her other ideas were hard on us, she was sensitive to our learning needs, especially mine. If we undertook a class project, she always found an important role for me to play – like the time she appointed me as official ‘picture finder’ when we created a mural-like map of Canada. Because I couldn’t draw recognizable pictures or even